

Clark's Island
in
Plymouth Bay:

A SUITABLE SITE

by Jack Post

Illustrations by Arthur Cady

□ WHETHER THE YEAR BE 1620 OR 1970, working an open boat under sail the length of the northerly shore of Cape Cod can be difficult enough, even in summer. But in December of that earlier year, with a driving easterly whipping sleet in from the broad ocean beyond the tip of the Cape, the shallop from the *Mayflower* with her rudder smashed so that she must be steered by oars, could do little more than run before the following seas. Toward late afternoon, the mast snapped in a sudden puff, and the sail sagged overboard to leeward, dragging the boat dangerously across the force of the wind. Frantically, the crew and the Pilgrim men in the waist of the boat wrestled the sodden mass of canvas and snarled tackle back aboard, shipping green water and nearly capsizing the craft as they did so.

With no means to maneuver, they could see breakers at the end of a long sandbank ahead. Urged on by the seamen, they heaved the oars out from under the tangle of rigging and shipped them in the thole pins. Then, two to each sweep, the company rowed for their lives, angling across the wind and tide toward the deeper water beyond the bar. Once in the channel, the flow of the current and the quartering wind drove them along parallel to the beach. When they saw the bay opening up ahead, they pulled hard to round under the shelter of the wooded island looming to starboard.

In the west, the rolling clouds slowly broke as the wind shifted north, then northwest; but with the sleety rain ending, the temperature began to drop sharply, and as the longboat crept into the quiet cove in

This month marks the beginning of celebrations in England and Holland observing the 350th anniversary of the historic events everyone associates with the year 1620. One of these events was the Pilgrims' first worship service on these shores. It is now possible to visit the exact spot, one of the rare places little changed in the last 350 years . . .



*The view from "Election Rock."
("On the Seventh Day, Wee Rested.")*

"Many distinguished men bearing the name

the dusk, the weary men at the oars shivered, and sought to fasten their soaking greatcoats against the chill.

Standing in the stern sheets, John Clarke, First Mate of the *Mayflower*, and in charge of this expedition to explore the coast and discover a suitable site on which to land the ship's passengers, leaned hard on the steering oar and headed for the stony beach ahead. Carver, Bradford, Winslow, Standish, and the others crowded between the thwarts, intently scanned the trees above the tide line, for Indians could be lurking close by in the forest, as they had been last week at First Encounter Beach, when a score of arrows had dropped among the Pilgrims before the booming firearms had driven the savages back into the woods.

As the keel grated on the pebbles, Clarke splashed through the frigid water and up onto the land, followed by Standish and the others, gripping muskets that would be of little use until the flints could be dried. No challenge came from the trees, and

the men moved warily into the glade, seeking a safe, sheltered spot for a camp, and, most of all, a campfire.

Three men, deployed by Standish, returned to report no trace of savages or habitation. Meanwhile, supplies were being lugged up from the boat, now beached safely just above high tide line; a little of the precious gunpowder had been used to ignite twigs, dry branches had been thrown on, and now a cheerful fire was roaring in the little hollow. Some took off their greatcoats to dry them on sticks before the heat; others roasted themselves slowly, turning like chickens on a vertical spit, until they warmed to the inside. Salt meat from the ship's stores, washed down with a treasured ration of beer, soon disappeared. Then, giving thanks to God for their deliverance this day, the Pilgrims lay down and slept.

The next day, December 20, fell on Sunday, and no man worked on the Sabbath. So in the bitter cold dawn, the little group warmed the stiffness from their bodies before the



Watson have sprung from the island . . ."

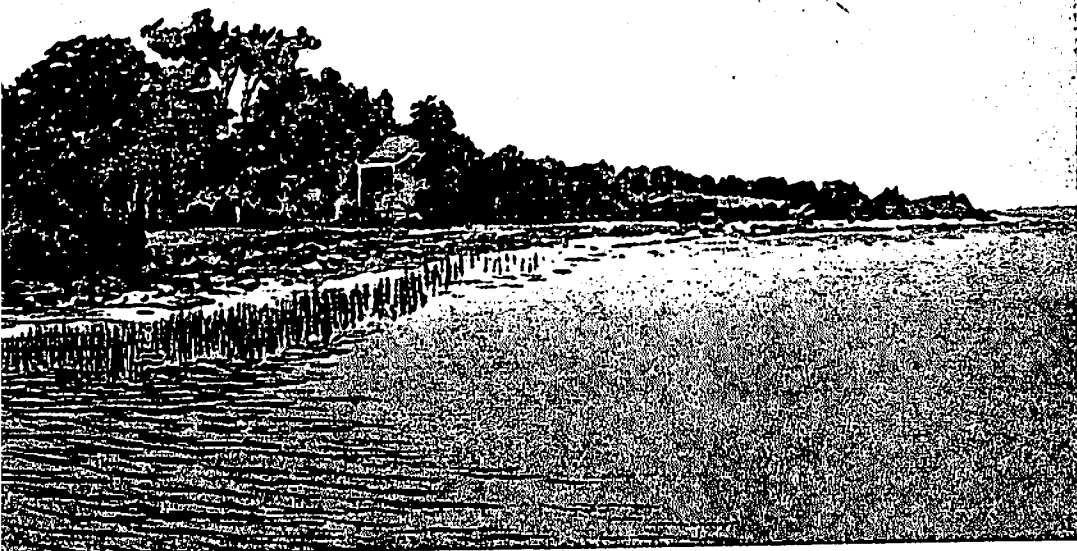
fire, then, as the sun rose, marched in ragged order through the woods up to the crest of the island, whence they might see the shape of the region in which they had landed, and where they might find an eminence suitable to worship God on His day. Near the top they found a great, jutting ledge, and there held the first service ashore in the new land, naming the place Election Rock, to signify the choice of this site as a temple to the Lord.

Not until Monday did they re-rig the shallop and resume their exploration. Rounding the long sandspit to the west of their island (which they had named Clarke's, now Clark's, after the mate who had first ventured ashore there), they followed the twisting channel a long mile toward the shore. Here a brook tumbled down beside a small hill, and the ground lay bare of forest. Up the brook they came upon abandoned Indian cornfields, cleared, and ready for spring planting. They determined to fetch the *Mayflower* to this bay, land their

people at the great rock there at the head of the tidewater, and begin to build their new Plymouth. Cruel trials would lie ahead, but their determination was great, and their faith strong. With the help of God, they would prevail.

The Pilgrims did not again come back to Clark's Island to settle for some years, but the tall, virgin timber there, so handy to the water, they set aside for the use and support of their minister, so that when masts, or logs suitable for sawing into boards, or cedar posts were required in their growing colony or in the new town of Boston, the pastor could receive some return for his labors in the name of God. Unfortunately, the Massachusetts Bay Colony proved very slow in paying, and the pastor and his poor suffered accordingly.

Around 1642, the Plymouth Colony established a salt works on Clark's Island as the virgin timber fell and the slopes became open to the sun. With no refrigeration, salt then was desperately needed to pre-





"Near the top, they found a great jutting ledge (l.) and there held the first service ashore in the new land . . ."

serve meat and fish, and indeed could be used for currency. A man at work under the hot sun in the drying beds earned his salt in full measure.

When King Philip's War broke out in 1675, the original treaty between the Pilgrims and Massasoit had been successfully kept for over half a century, and many of the nearby tribes had embraced Christianity. These converts could not be abandoned to the fierce fanatics warring against the English, nor could they prudently be left at large lest they turn against their white mentors. Accordingly, some 1200 "praying Indians" were transplanted to the security of Clark's Island, where they could be both protected and watched. Not before or since have these rocky acres been so densely populated.

Until around 1680 no house had been built upon the island; but by that time Plymouth had grown so, and boasted such diverse contacts with the outside world, that contagious diseases occasionally threatened the colony. Plagues could be handled then only by isolation of the disease; so a pest house was erected on Clark's Island, where a devoted widow, one Mother White, tended the sick, sailing alone to meet a supply boat in a section of the channel off Plymouth which came to be known as "Mother White's Guzzle." There, necessities were tossed from one boat to the other without touch-

ing, and she sailed back to the lonely sick on the island.

Although Clark's Island had been obtained by the Plymouth Colony in a treaty from the Indians, in 1687 the high-handed Governor Andros laid claim to the island in the name of King James II, and then transferred it to one Nathaniel Clark of Plymouth, for considerations suspected but not known. Plymouth called a Town Meeting, resolved to fight this outrageous seizure of Town property; and eventually, in 1689, after the recall and jailing of both Governor Andros and his lackey Clark, did recover the island. But the fight had been long and bitter; so in 1690, to recover the costs, Plymouth sold Clark's Island to three of its citizens—George Morton, Samuel Lucas, and Elkanah Watson—for £120 sterling.

Very soon Elkanah died, and his son, John Watson, acquired the interest of the other two purchasers, inaugurating a dynasty on Clark's Island that has continued for 280 years, down to the present day. Although for several generations now no Watson has lived year round on the island, the family still owns much of the land and all but three of the 10 houses scattered along the shore.

Some six generations (about 85 years) after the Watson purchase of Clark's Island, another Elkanah emerged to considerable fame in the

(continued on page 134)



Left: Election Rock

A SUITABLE SITE (continued from page 129)

years of the American Revolution, when, as a boy of 17, he successfully delivered a shipment of more than a ton of gunpowder from John Brown of Providence to General Washington, then besieging the British at Boston. Two years later, young Watson, entrusted with a sizable stake, again as representative of the Brown family, found himself trading most successfully in France, where he became a close friend of our ambassador, Benjamin Franklin. Watson, before he reached 30, was again conferring with Washington, this time at Mt. Vernon, on the subject of a possible inland waterway, safe from foreign interference, which eventually was constructed as the Erie Canal.

Many distinguished men bearing the name Watson have sprung from the island, including Benjamin Marston Watson, the botanist, and a long line of sea captains famous in the great days of sail. In the memory of living descendants, Edward Winslow Watson, an intimate of Thoreau, Emerson, and the Alcotts, farmed the island with his brother, Albert Mortimer Watson, raising corn and beans and the famous Clark's Island turnips. Now for half a century, the island has not been farmed, with

first the underbrush and then the trees taking over the fertile fields.

In the decade of the 1960s, Sarah Wingate Taylor, poet, authoress, and conservator of Pilgrim lore, herself a direct descendant of Gov. Edward Winslow, who had landed on Clark's Island with the half frozen men from the shallop on that December night in 1620, did much to perpetuate her heritage. For many summers she invited literary and artistic people to share her island and her knowledge; and on her death, in 1964, she bequeathed "Cedarfield" (long known as "r'Other House," the second house built after the original "Old House") to a trust now administered for the generations to come by the Duxbury Rural and Historical Society. The land encompasses broad acreage around the house and up the hill through the woods to include Election Rock, where the Pilgrims held their first service ashore in their new country.

None of the utilities so necessary to modern life has yet intruded upon Clark's Island, and no one now spends the harsh winters there. But in summer members of the Watson clan return to enjoy a measure of primitive living after the manner of their ancestors. And now those of us



PEACHAM ACADEMY

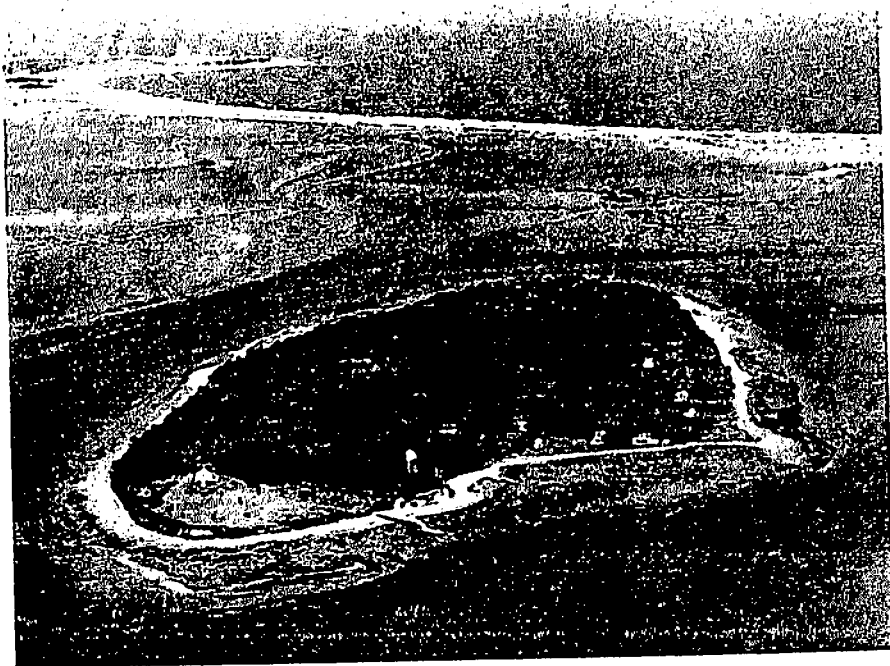
Oldest Private School in Vermont

Sound college preparatory program for boys and girls in a delightful warm-hearted hill town. Teacher-student ratio 10-1 for individualized teaching. Wholesome outdoor activities. Active sports program. Ski instruction.

Dept. Y-5.

Arthur W. Ross, Headmaster
Peacham, Vermont 05862

A YANKEE SCHOOL IN A YANKEE TOWN

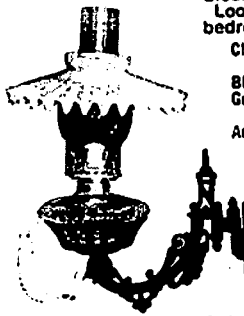


Clark's Island from 1000 feet—taken just a year ago
(Photo by Locke Aero Photo)

who wish can explore the wooded paths beneath trees that slowly begin to approach the size of those the Pilgrims saw from the shallop. We can walk up to Election Rock, and read the carved inscription, "On the Seventh Day, Wee Rested," taken


from the words set down in Governor Bradford's journal concerning that first Sunday, 350 years ago on this very island. Life on the mainland has come far since then, but Clark's Island remains the same.

THE END



Electrified reproduction pin up with Petticoat Shade. Looks like your Grandmother's kitchen. Attractive in bedroom, hall or bath. Approx. 15" height — 13" depth.

Clear fount - white shade	88127
Blue fount and shade	88106
Green fount and shade	88101
Amber fount and shade	88102
\$18.95 postpaid	
Cranberry fount and shade	88104
\$19.95 postpaid	
Add \$1.00 postage West of Miss.	



Electrified reproduction Rayo Wall lamp. Brass finish, polished and lacquered. 10" White Student Shade. Approx. height 22" — Depth 9 1/2". Complete \$23.95 ppd.

ANTIQUES, ETC.
412 Euclid Avenue Elmira, New York 14905